



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
MARCH 29, 2021

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Testimony on
H.B. No 6666 An Act Concerning The Department Of Public Health's Recommendations Regarding Various Revisions To The Public Health Statutes

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Hwang, Senator Sommers, Representative Petit, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee, thank you for considering my testimony in support of revisions in Sec. 70 -72 of H.B. No 6666 An Act Concerning the Department of Public Health's Recommendations Regarding Various Revisions to the Public Health Statutes. I serve as the Executive Director at the Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC), a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding affordable housing, and building strong communities in Connecticut.

PSC staffs and manages the statewide *Reaching Home Campaign* to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut. *Reaching Home* brings together over 120 state and non-profit partners to identify and implement data-driven policy solutions and prepare a consensus legislative agenda.

Youth with lived experience of homelessness and housing instability are critical leaders in *Reaching Home*, particularly in the Reaching Home Youth and Young Adult Workgroup. Youth members pointed out that access to identity documents is a significant barrier for youth and young adults, including minors, who are experiencing homelessness and housing instability in Connecticut.

Reaching Home strongly supports Sec. 70-72 which will allow for two critical changes: the Department of Public Health and registrars of vital statistics can waive the fee for a certified copy of a birth certificate for youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness; and the Department of Motor Vehicles can waive the fee for a State Identity Card for youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness.

In 2020, there were an estimated 7,800 youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability in Connecticut¹. Just under 2,500 of these were estimated to be literally homeless.

Currently, state law does not allow for a fee waiver for an individual to get a copy of their birth certificate. It does allow individuals who are guests of a homeless shelter or facility for homeless persons to receive a waiver for a state ID (CGS sec. 1-1h). However, many youth and young adults experiencing homelessness or unstable housing are often not staying in shelter. They are more likely



to be “couch surfing”, seeking support from friends or relatives, or staying with others in unsafe situations.

These youth face many obstacles when trying to achieve stability in their employment, education, and living situation. It is critical that this population, perhaps more than any other, given their particular vulnerabilities, have access to supportive services and other benefit programs. Obstacles to accessing services and programs can be tied to the difficulty of obtaining identity documents including birth certificates and state identifications.

States including FL, TX, MD, IL, and CA all provide fee waivers specifically for youth experiencing homelessness. These states define homelessness consistent with the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act which includes youth who are “doubled up” with others- the most common form of youth homelessness.

These revisions also broaden the definitions of “Certified homeless youth” and adds a definition of “Certified homeless young adult”, both of which are amended to be consistent with the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Without the fee waivers, youth and young adults experiencing homelessness will continue to have a nominal fiscal barrier that has significant impacts to their ability to access employment opportunities, participate in community-based programs (eg: workforce development programs, violence prevention programs), delays in housing, and difficulties in accessing critical community and medical supports.

The Partnership for Strong Communities and the Reaching Home Campaign supports these proposed revisions to ensure that youth and young adults experiencing homelessness have this barrier removed from their path toward housing stability and self-sufficiency. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your continued support in ensuring instances of youth homelessness in CT is rare, brief, and one-time.

Respectfully submitted,



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ⁱ <https://cceh.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Youth-Count-FINAL.pdf>